

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY LIMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8529

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIMA 0763

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PE

SUBJECT: POLITICAL SCENE TENSE AS FEBRUARY APPROACHES

REF: LIMA 0711

1. IN THE WAKE OF UNPOPULAR GOP ECONOMIC MEASURES AND AS FEBRUARY 1 (TURNOVER OF PREMIERSHIP TO FERNANDEZ MALDONADO) AND FEBRUARY 5 (ANNIVERSARY OF 1975 RIOTS) DATES APPROACH, THE LIMA RUMOR MILL IS WORKING OVERTIME. MOST PREVALENT RUMOR INVOLVES CONJECTURE ON MOUNTING OPPOSITION TO FERNANDEZ MALDONADO WITHIN THE MILITARY BECAUSE OF HIS RADICAL ORIENTATION AND HIS ALLEGED TIES TO LOCAL AND FOREIGN COMMUNIST ELEMENTS.

2. ACCORDING TO ONE ACCOUNT, FERNANDEZ MALDONADO WAS IMPLICATED IN A MID-1960'S COVER-UP OF A MURDER CASE INVOLVING A GUERRILLA LEADER WHO IS NOW AN IMPORTANT CIVILIAN PARTICIPANT IN THE REVOLUTION. FORMER MINISTER OF INTERIOR ARTOLA IS EXPECTED TO PUBLICIZE THE CASE WITH THE AIM OF FORCING FERNANDEZ MALDONADO OUT OF OFFICE. OTHER RUMORS RELATE TO PLOTTING BETWEEN FERNANDEZ MALDONADO AND FORMER LIMA REGIONAL COMMANDER GENERAL RODRIGUEZ FIGUEROA WHO WAS FORCED INTO RETIREMENT IN OCTOBER 1975. RODRIGUEZ FIGUEROA, ALLEGEDLY WITH COMMUNIST SUPPORT, IS SAID TO BE MANIPULATING THE

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NASCENT FRONT FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE REVOLTUION. THE

FRONT IS PREPARING A FEBRUARY 5 RALLY TO COMMEMORATE LAST YEAR'S RIOTS AND DEMONSTRATE CIVILIAN SUPPORT FOR MILGOV. RALLY MAY OR MAY NOT REDOUND TO POLITICAL ADVANTAGE OF MORALES BERMUDEZ WHO IS SAID TO BE AWARE OF LEFTIST INFLUENCE IN FRONT AND HIS LACK OF CONTROL OVER IT.

3. SOME PERUVIAN CIRCLES, AT LEAST, EXPECT NEXT FEW DAYS TO BE DECISIVE AS REGARDS FERNANDEZ MALDONADO'S FUTURE AND THE COURSE OF THE REVOLUTION. WELL-INFORMED BUT NORMALLY RETICENT FOREIGN OFFICE SOURCE TOLD EMBASSY POLITICAL COUNSELOR JANUARY 22 THAT MILITARY IS IN PROCESS OF DECIDING FATE OF FERNANDEZ MALDONADO AND THAT MILITARY COMMANDERS ARE DEBATING ISSUE. SOURCE ALSO PASSED ON RUMOR OF GENERAL STRIKE (PRESUMABLY LED BY CGTP) IN NEXT DAY OR SO "IN SUPPORT OF FERNANDEZ MALDONADO AND AS A WARNING TO THE GOVERNMENT". EMBASSY HAS NO CONFIRMATION OF RUMORED STRIKE AND CGTP PUBLIC STATEMENTS CONTINUE TO SUPPORT, AT LEAST IN PRINCIPLE, GOP POLICIES INCLUDING ECONOMIC MEASURES.

4. CURRENT POLITICAL INDECISIVENESS PERHAPS MANIFESTED IN SECTORIZED PRESS, WHOSE EDITORS WERE INSTALLED BY RODRIGUEZ FIGUEROA AFTER FALL OF VELASCO. PRESS IS BEGINNING TO EXHIBIT AN ABNORMALLY CRITICAL TONE. ULTIMA HORA CARRIED FRONT PAGE EDITORIAL JANUARY 22, WARNINGS THAT IF ITS CALLS FOR LABOR DISCIPLINE WERE NOT ACCOMPANIED BY CONCOMITANT ACTION TO CHANGE CAPITALIST "STRUCTURE AND SUPER-STRUCTURE" IN ORDER TO MOVE PERU TOWARD SOCIALISM, THE UNITY OF PEOPLE AND ARMED FORCES COULD BE "RUPTURED". ALSO, LEFTIST DAILY CORREO BLEATS IN JANUARY 23 HEADLINE THAT IT CANNOT ACCEPT "ARBITRARY" GOP CUT IN NEWSPRINT ALLOCATION.

5. LATE JANUARY 1976 RUMORS RECALL THOSE OF 1975 EVEN TO ALLEGED UNREST IN GUARDIA CIVIL (POLICE STRIKE SET STAGE FOR FEBRUARY 5 RIOTS). THOSE RUMORS RELATING TO CHANGE IN PREMIERSHIP DIFFER IN THAT MORALES BERMUDEZ IN 1975 WAS OPPOSED BY THE LEFT WHILE OPPOSITION TO FERNANDEZ MALDONADO COMES FROM MORE CONSERVATIVE MILITARY AND CIVILIAN ELEMENTS. ALTHOUGH SPATE OF RUMORS MAY TAPER OFF SOMEWHAT FOLLOWING KEY FEBRUARY DATES AND CONFIRMATION (STILL LIKELY) OF FERNANDEZ MALDONADO, SERIOUS POLITICAL TENSIONS
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EXACERBATED BY DETERIORATING ECONOMIC CONDITIONS RE CERTAIN TO CONTINUE.
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